

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE C-15THE WASHINGTON POST
22 NOVEMBER 1982

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Andropov Rise Could Spell End of Detente

Despite the Kremlin's not-so-subtle disinformation campaign to paint Yuri Andropov as a moderate, or even a liberal, the new boss of the Soviet Union is a hard-liner whose elevation means rough times ahead for the long-suffering Russian people and the rest of the world.

Actually, anyone who thinks a man who ran the KGB for 15 years could be a liberal must also believe in the Tooth Fairy. The KGB is a combination CIA, the FBI and the Bureau of Prisons—but without any legal restraints. The head jailer is now in charge of the entire country.

For years, our intelligence agencies mistakenly thought that no one with a KGB background could hope to rise to the top of the Kremlin. At most, they believed, Andropov would have veto power over any would-be successor to Leonid Brezhnev.

As I reported three years ago, the CIA evaluated Andropov's position this way: "Any serious contender for the job of general secretary must ensure that he has the tacit approval of the security organ if not its active support." Within the last year, however, Western intelligence began to

rethink its assessment of Andropov's chances. In fact, as early as last May, I reported my intelligence sources' hunch that Andropov would be the one to grab the brass ring.

The CIA may have been slow to consider the possibility that Andropov would be Brezhnev's successor, but it was never under any illusions about the nature of the beast. In November, 1979, sources told my associate Bob Sherman that Andropov is "an astute, ruthless party bureaucrat whose cold and calculating attitude" fit him well for his job as KGB boss.

What this means for Soviet-U.S. relations is that detente is dead. As long as Andropov is in charge at the Kremlin, the United States can expect a tough Soviet policy on all fronts. The man who supervised the crushing of the Hungarian uprising as Soviet ambassador in 1956 can hardly be expected to be lenient on Poland or other restive satellites.

The big question now is how long Andropov will remain in charge. I've seen secret CIA reports on his health; he is far from robust.

At 68, Andropov is a relative stripling by the standards of the Soviet gerontocracy. But he has serious health problems. In 1966, he suffered a heart attack, and in the mid-1970s he required surgery so major that he spent 10 weeks in the hospital, according to the CIA.

Power, as ex-secretary of state Henry A. Kissinger fondly believed,

may be the ultimate aphrodisiac; it may also be the ultimate tonic. Brezhnev was in frail health for years, yet he never relinquished his grip on the Soviet power apparatus. Andropov can be expected to be every bit as tenacious now.

In the Byzantine atmosphere of the Kremlin, no one can relax in the top job. The other old men Andropov beat out will not give up easily.

But Andropov still has the ace in the hole: the loyalty of the KGB. The men who run the Gulag Archipelago now have one of their own in control, and they're not likely to abdicate their newly enhanced power and prestige.

Headlines and Footnotes: When the Arthritis Foundation took over a two-story building in Atlanta for its new national headquarters, it had to install an elevator to accommodate arthritics. What's odd about the lack of an elevator is that the building's previous owner was Otis Elevator Co. The elevator installed was an Otis.

• "Blue Monday" is evidently a well-founded expression. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, more people commit suicide on Monday than on any other day of the week. Saturday has the lowest score in suicides—but the highest in motor-vehicle deaths, 83 percent more than on Tuesday, the lowest day. Saturday is also the day when most murders occur; its average is 74 percent higher than Wednesday, the lowest in that respect.